

Bringing a Harbor Freight Wire Twisting Pliers Into Usefulness, Version 1.1

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In my humble opinion, there are 3 kinds of Harbor Freight tools.

First we have tools that are hands down fantastic. My two 4½ inch angle grinders fall into that category. So do my countless number of digital multimeters. I use these meters as a component in larger electronics projects.

At the other end of the spectrum are tools that are hopeless. In almost all cases I look at them in the store and just walk away. One that I bought and remanufactured was the XY table. It was so bad that the device shipped with all fasteners loose. Tighten these screws and the damn thing froze up. I spent a lot of time re-machining all sliding surfaces and making it true. Mostly wasted time because there wasn't enough metal to keep it rigid. Not a loss because I learned a lot about how to machine precision matching surfaces.

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In the middle are product that can be modified into usefulness. The one I bought recently is in that category.

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I checked on line and Harbor Freight is correct when they say compare at \$35. Compare price, *not* functionality! As with most of the products in the middle and bottom categories, the form is about right but the functionality isn't there.

I took the tool out of the box while in the store. It was in the locked position and nothing I could do would unlock it. I took it to the very helpful store manager and he managed to squeeze the handles together enough to unlock it. Good enough proof for me - spent the \$10 (minus the ubiquitous 20% off coupon).



As hard as it was to unlock the pliers with no wire in the jaws, it was flat out hopeless with even the finest gage wire. Time to go talk to an expert, my friend Ed.

Ed had used a "real" wire twisting pliers. I learned that for \$35 you get a pliers with springy handles. OK. I think I can do that.

One way to make these handles more springy would be to thin them. Too much work. A second way is to make a series of cuts that approximate a continuous thinning of the handles. A minute on my bandsaw produced this:



The cuts are about 1/16" deep every 3/16". The other handle is welded to the center rod so access was not possible.

I was able to grab 0.041" stainless steel wire without undue effort. Today I used the tool many times to twist this wire as I secured rows of LED rope lights.

My best results came when I locked the pliers to the wire ends and twisted the pliers manually. That central cylinder with knob on end spins the pliers. That didn't work well at least in this application.

Time will tell if my cuts into the handle cause the metal to fail. Didn't really have much choice.

I welcome your comments and questions.

If you wish to be contacted each time I publish an article, email me with just "Article Alias" in the subject line.

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